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THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20301

JCSM-286-67

20 May 1967

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

Subject: Operations Against North Vietnam (U)

1. (TS) In JCSM-218-67, dated 20 April 1967, subject: "Force Requirements - Southeast Asia, FY 1968 (U)," the Joint Chiefs of Staff stated that one general area of military effort that should be pursued in the conduct of the war in Southeast Asia is to obstruct and reduce imports of war-sustaining materials into North Vietnam (NVN). This memorandum provides supplementary views and recommendations on this subject.

2. (TS) The estimated total imports into NVN have steadily increased from approximately 800,000 metric tons (MT) in 1964 to over 1,000,000 MT in 1965 and to a high of over 1,365,000 MT in 1966. There are strong indications that imports during 1967 will increase substantially as monthly record tonnages have been received during the early months of this year. This level of imports portends further significant improvements in NVN's war-making potential. While the actual quantity of military equipment being imported by sea is not known, 85 percent of the total tonnage of war-supporting material arrives through the ports. The present air campaign, with existing targeting and operational restraints, cannot obstruct this importation capability and has allowed NVN to absorb the damage and accommodate to our attacks.

3. (TS) The Joint Chiefs of Staff are seriously concerned at the prospective introduction by the USSR of new weapons into NVN, which could include improved antiaircraft and surface-to-air missiles, guided missile patrol boats, surface-to-surface missiles, and a variety of artillery and direct fire weapons. Such weapons would further improve the NVN air and coastal defense systems and provide offensive capabilities which would pose additional threats to our military forces and installations in Southeast Asia. The USSR probably would act favorably on an NVN request for such weapons.

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4. ~~(S)~~ The means by which military supplies can be provided to NVN from the USSR are by rail across China, by sea, and by airlift.

a. Aircraft, SAM equipment, and munitions are believed to have been delivered primarily by rail. Intelligence indicates a probable recent Sino-Soviet agreement whereby China will continue to support such overland shipments of military materiel.

b. The major volume of military supplies has been imported by sea through the port of Haiphong, including helicopters, trucks, construction equipment and materials, POL, and a number of all-purpose cranes suitable for SAM handling. The coaling ports of Hon Gai and Cam Pha as import alternates for Haiphong are limited by lack of rail clearance; however, their import capacities could be increased to a total of 2,500 MT per day by reducing coal exports.

c. NVN has eight major operational airfields that could serve as terminals for delivery of priority military materiel. Intelligence has indicated a recent Sino-Soviet agreement for shipments through China to NVN.

5. ~~(S)~~ The Hanoi-Haiphong areas constitute the principal NVN logistical base. This base should be neutralized. This can be accomplished by direct attack on these areas which would increase the danger of high civilian casualties or, more preferably, by interdiction of land and sea lines of communication which enter and depart from the area. However, for such an interdiction campaign to be effective, elements of the import system in NVN must be attacked concurrently on a sustained basis. The campaign must be of sufficient weight to reduce imports to a level which will seriously impair the NVN war-supporting capability. The level of effort required to accomplish this task is within Southeast Asia force capabilities. The Joint Chiefs of Staff believe that such a campaign against the total import capability should be initiated immediately.

a. The facility which provides the prime terminal for the sea LOCs is Haiphong. While Haiphong could be attacked in several ways, in recognition of the political considerations, the Joint Chiefs of Staff propose a course of action to "shoulder out" foreign shipping and then mine the harbor and approaches. This can be accomplished by a series of air attacks commencing on the periphery of the port area and gradually moving to the center of the port complex. These successful attacks will reduce the functional efficiency of the port and could be expected to force foreign shipping out into the nearby estuaries for off-loading by lighterage.

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b. At that time, with minimum likelihood of damage to shipping, the remaining elements of the port can be taken under attack and the harbor mined. The exact location of the minefields will be determined at the appropriate time as their locations will be dependent on the dispersion pattern of foreign shipping after being "shouldered out" of the immediate port area.

c. While the Haiphong port is being attacked, an intensive interdiction campaign will be initiated against the roads and railroads from China. The deep water ports of Cam Pha and Hon Gai will be attacked as required. Maximum effort will be made to keep the northeast railroad nonoperational. Coastal armed reconnaissance will be intensified to detect and destroy NVN shipping in transit and transshipment locations along the NVN coast.

d. In addition a systematic attack against the eight major operational airfields will be initiated concurrently with attacks on the surface LOCs. At present, attacks are authorized against Kien An Airfield, Kep Airfield, and Hoa Lac Airfield. Attacks against all eight of these airfields would restrict air importation of critical military supplies, reduce the capability of the air defense system by decreasing the MIG threat, and impede expansion of the NVN air order of battle.

6. (mc) Should the United States effectively close the Haiphong harbor to deep water shipping by bombing and mining, the Soviets would:

a. Probably protest such an action diplomatically by propaganda, and perhaps by seeking condemnation of the United States in the United Nations.

b. Possibly suspend current diplomatic negotiations, such as the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty and the "Proposed Freeze on ABM and ICBM Deployment."

c. Continue to avoid an active confrontation with the United States.

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~~TOP SECRET~~

d. Seek alternative means for providing the required materiel support to the NVN war effort, including increased use of rail shipments through China and use of Chinese and possibly Cambodian ports for off-loading and further transshipment. There is a possibility that, as air attacks close in toward the Haiphong port (Target 70), some foreign shipping might choose not to leave the port and could be damaged.

7. ~~(TS)~~ The sequential pattern of proposed attacks on the Haiphong port complex has been initiated by the recent airstrikes on the two Haiphong thermal power plants. Current attacks against the cement plant and restrike of Haiphong POL continue the pattern. Sequential and continuing attacks are proposed as follows:

a. Haiphong RR Yds W; Area C (Shipyard #1), Area D (Naval Base), Target 70, Haiphong port.

b. Haiphong RR Yd/Shops: Area A (Shipyard #1), Area F (Shipyard #2), and Area G (Shipyard North), Target 70, Haiphong port.

c. Target 70, Haiphong port (all elements) and mining of harbor. The location of the targets and elements of the Haiphong port are depicted in the Appendix.

8. ~~(TS)~~ The Joint Chiefs of Staff conclude that no important element of the NVN LOC system can be permitted to function freely. They therefore recommend that, as a matter of urgency, the initiation of the attack program as outlined above be authorized. In addition to the reasons cited above, an early approval will allow attacks during the favorable May - September weather season and before onset of the unfavorable weather conditions which seriously impair operations.

9. ~~(C)~~ The Joint Chiefs of Staff request that their views as contained in this memorandum be presented to the President.

For the Joint Chiefs of Staff:

Signed

EARLE G. WHEELER
Chairman
Joint Chiefs of Staff

Attachment

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